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Foreign Affairs, Africa : Statement on H.R. 3100, The Foreign Assistance Authorization Act 11/18/ 1997

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AND FINANCE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
THE ENVIRONMENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND POWER

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

STATEMENT ON H.R. 3100, THE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AUTHORIZATION ACT

November 18, 1987

Mr. Chairman, I rise today to express my strong endorsement of the enhancements and improvements contained in the foreign assistance authorization legislation which provide a framework for a return to the basics of humanitarian development aid to people in need overseas.

The bill as it stands and as amended by measures being offered by the distinguished chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. Fascell, represents a long-overdue revision of the foreign aid program in a direction I commend and support. The drafters of the bill deserve much credit for their efforts which result, for the first time in this decade, in a program providing more, not less, for efforts to feed the hungry, fight disease, protect the environment, and assist the chronic poor.

Mr. Chairman, over the past seven years the U.S. foreign assistance program has gone through a radical and, I believe, a dangerous transformation. Funding for our food and development assistance program has decreased sixteen percent in seven years, while the military assistance program has more than doubled. The implications are obvious. Funding for projects to address basic health needs, to provide primary education, to protect the environment, to expand food production, to construct essential infrastructure, and to meet a host of needs in developing countries has evaporated.

In its place there has been first an ever-increasing amount of funding for military equipment and training to countries that still cannot feed their own populations. The shift in funding levels sends a signal to developing countries that the U.S. is becoming less interested in the strength of their development programs, the health and livelihoods of their people, and more interested in the strength of their armed forces.

The American people do not want such a shift away from humanitarian concerns, and I believe that it is time that we in

Congress bring our foreign aid program back into balance. H.R. 3100 is a first and major step in that direction.

As the bill currently stands, military assistance programs would be reduced \$19 million from last year's levels, while development assistance would be increased by \$153 million. I strongly support these funding levels as the beginning of a process to re-establish the emphasis on development assistance in the foreign aid program which I believe is proper and which the people of this country support.

Over the past seven years, Africa has been progressively and continuously allocated a declining share of the development assistance funding. Africa received 12.5 percent of the funding in 1980, and only 7.2 percent in 1987. This decline in funding -- a decline in real terms, not just percentages -- has occurred at a time when many African countries have committed themselves to difficult economic reforms requiring outside assistance, when several face severe famine due to drought or insurgency, and when all are struggling to become more self-sufficient.

The United States cannot and must not turn its back on the people of Africa during this critical hour of development. We who played such a crucial role in responding to the urgent crisis of 1984/85, cannot now risk a sharp slide into recurring famine and endless tragedy. Sub-Saharan Africa has a higher proportion of people at risk of starvation than any region in the world. Africa must, therefore, receive a reasonable share of the foreign assistance program.

H.R. 3100 currently includes \$450 million in development assistance for the Fund for Africa and \$50 million for the Southern Africa Development Coordinating Conference. These levels are significant -- but not adequate. Africa needs more assistance and we can afford to provide more. I strongly urge my colleagues to support Mr. Fascell's amendment to earmark \$85 million in the Economic Support Fund (ESF) for Africa. By doing so, we demonstrate our commitment to Africa's development and to its people. By doing so, we provide African nations with a greater opportunity for progress, for reform, and perhaps for survival.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.